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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that the transition of children from one educational program to another can be stressful. Two questionnaires, called Transition Planners, were developed to help parents think about and prepare their learning impaired or handicapped children for the transition from preschool to elementary school. Thirty families were targets of transition programming: 18 lived in a suburban community and 12 in a rural county. Parents were eligible for participation if their child attended one of four special preschool classrooms and anticipated attending a new program. Categories and items included in the planning aids were chosen after conversations with parents, review by professionals, and 1 year of pilot testing. Transition Planner 1 was designed for use prior to the planning of the child's indivdualized educational plan in the fall of the final preschool year. This Planner assists parents in identifying sources of information regarding transition and ways to prepare for it. Transition Planner 2 was designed for use prior to the school placement meeting during the spring of the child's final preschool year. This Planner helps parents identify program characteristics which they consider relevant to their child's placement, and can be used to evaluate programs visited by parents. Findings of analyses of parents' responses to questionnaire items and of group comparisons are discussed. (RH)

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Individualizing Family Involvement in School Transitions[a]

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Abstract

Two Transition Planners containing rating scales and open-ended questions were developed to assist parents in transition planning. Parents of children beginning their final preschool year rated the importance of items to identify family and child transition needs, level of family involvement in transition planning, and family-staff areas of responsibility. Areas rated very important by most parents were parent participation level, receiving program description, and teacher characteristics. Open-ended questions revealed individual differences in areas such as what skills parents wanted children working on and ways schools could make the transition easier for the family.

Introduction

Because stress often accompanies change, the transition between early intervention programs and elementary school programs may produce stress. Transitions require considerable change within the family system (Fowler, 1982; Winton, Turnbull, & Blacher, 1984). Families must alter routines, develop trust in new educational services and school personnel, and adapt to school program differences such as decreases in parent-teacher contact and increases in child-teacher ratios (Johnson, Chandler, Kerns, & Fowler, 1986). Participating as a member of the transition planning team can help families (a) reduce transition-related stress or deal more effectively with stress, (b) learn about and prepare for changes that will occur during the transition period, and (c) identify child and family transition-related needs.

In addition to increasing the family's ability to deal with transition-related stress, family participation on transition teams benefits the transition process. Families can (a) foster child adjustment to a new program (Zigler, 1985), (b) facilitate maintenance and generalization of learned skills across programs (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982; Vincent, Laten, Salisbury, Brown, & Baumguart, 1981), (c) provide important information about child and family needs (Turnbull & Winton, 1984), (d) be responsible for such tasks as visiting potential receiving programs and

conducting home-based skill training (Shearer & Shearer, 1977), and (e) be supportive of other team members' efforts (Baker, 1982; Cartwright, 1981).

While families may be valuable transition team members, not all families can or want to be involved in transition planning in the same way or to the same extent (Bristol, 1984; Dunst, 1983). For example, the number of family members, sources of social support, and job status of family members may influence a family's participation (Chandler, Fowler, & Lubeck, in press; Turnbull, Summers, & Brotherson, 1983). Transition planning programs must respond to individual differences in family ability and desire to be involved by individualizing each family's role on the transition team (Dunst, 1983; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982; Winton & Turnbull, 1981).

The purpose of this paper is to describe two Transition Planners which help families and professionals develop a family's role during transition. The planners help identify family and child needs, level of family involvement on the transition team, and family and staff areas of responsibility.

Methods

Subjects

Thirty families were the targets of transition programming. Eighteen lived in a university, suburban community of 52,738, and 12 lived in a rural county of 24,000. Eighteen children targeted

for transition were male and 12 were female. Children's ages at the time that transition planning began ranged from 4 years 0 months to 6 years 2 months, with an average of 4 years 9 months. Table 1 presents a description of the type of children participating in the transition process. At the time that

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Insert Table 1

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transition planning began, ten children attended Preschool A (n=20), which served children with moderate to severe language delays; three attended Preschool B (n=16), which served children with moderate, severe, or multiple handicaps; five attended Preschool C (n=8), which served children with behavior and learning problems (Preschool C children were considered at risk but had no formal diagnosis of a handicapping condition). The remaining 12 children attended Preschool D (n=24) which served all ranges of handicapping condition.

Parents were eligible for participation if their child (a) had been enrolled in one of four targeted special preschool classrooms at least 50% of the school day during the year prior to the transition and (b) would be enrolling in a new program within the next year. Twenty-five of the 30 children had siblings living at home; fifteen of the 30 children had older siblings.

Procedures

Transition Planners (TP) were developed to assist parents during two stages of transition (TP1- Planning the transition and TP2-Selecting a program). Categories and items included in the Transition Planners were chosen after conversations with parents, review by professionals in the field, and one year of pilot testing.

Transition Planner 1 (TP1) contained categories designed to help parents plan for their child's transition from one class or school to another class or school. Parents completed TP1 in the fall semester of their child's final year in preschool. The major categories focused upon: General transition information; sources of program information; parent's participation level; and sources of child progress information. Each category contained seven to 13 specific items which were rated in importance on a four-point Likert scale (not applicable=0, not important=1, somewhat important=2, very important=3). A four-point Likert scale was used to offset the large quantity of items on the Transition Planner and to provide a moderately simple task. Parents were asked to rank the three items they considered most important. Rankings were included to help parents focus upon their priorities as they attended the annual I.E.P. meeting and other meetings related to their child's transition. TP1 also contained 20 open-ended questions. After completing Transition

Planner 1, parents and interviewers completed a list of transitional-related goals for inclusion in the child's I.E.P.

Transition Planner 2 (TP2) required rating and ranking of items designed to help parents select their child's next class or school. Parents completed TP2 in the spring semester of their child's final year in preschool. The major categories focused upon: General description of receiving (new) programs; sources of program information; parent's participation in receiving program; specific features of receiving programs; description of teacher characteristics; description of classroom characteristics; description of other children in classroom; and criteria for selecting the receiving program. The number of items within each category ranged from seven to 15. Four open-ended questions were also included. After completing TP2, parents were given a checklist to complete for use during their visits to potential receiving programs and meetings with school personnel. The checklist provided instructions for completing and using the checklist, as well as tips on what to do before and after visits (e.g., telephone the school to learn the best time for a visit to the classroom; if you have questions and concerns and the teacher is not able to talk during the classroom visit, consider a telephone call or later meeting).

Transition Planners were used by interviewers who marked the questionnaire during face-to-face interviews with the parent(s)

according to ratings, rankings, and comments given by the parent(s). Twenty-one of the 30 interviews took place in family homes, and the remaining nine took place at school. Interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Interviewers trained and attended practice sessions which emphasized (a) instructions to interviewers and respondents, (b) content and organization of the interview, (c) questioning and probing methods, and (d) note-taking and coding. Interviewers used abbreviated codes and noted parents' responses. Likert ratings were transferred to code sheets for analysis.

Design

Parent ratings for each item were grouped by locality (suburban community vs. rural county) and then averaged. Group ratings of items and categories were also compared.

Results

A Pearson correlation was obtained from group category means to determine a relationship between grouped responses across localities for each category. These are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2

In general, responses by parents in both groups were similar. All categories had moderate (.45 to .79) or high (>.80) correlations (Mason & Bramble, 1978) between groups' ratings of

items within each category. Because the correlation between the two group's category ratings was moderate to high, all subsequent analyses combine the two groups' data.

Figure 1 presents the mean ratings of all categories.

Insert Figure 1

Parents' mean ratings consistently fell between somewhat important (2.0) and very important (3.0). Figure 1 also shows ranges of individual item means within each category. The item means ranged from 1.7 to 3.0 across all categories. Category and item means were calculated by summing ratings within the item or category and dividing by the total number of ratings of one (not important), two (somewhat important), and three (very important). All ratings of zero (not applicable) were eliminated from this analysis. Four categories received average ratings of 2.6 or higher. These categories were: TP1-parent's participation level; TP2-general description of receiving programs, parent's participation in receiving program, and description of teacher characteristics. Item means within these four categories were always above 2.0 (somewhat important), indicating greater importance of all items within these categories.

Table 3 presents those items within each category which 80%

Insert Table 3

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or more parents rated very important (3.0). All categories had at least one item rated very important by at least 80% of the parents. Categories 8 (Specific features of receiving programs) and 9 (Teacher characteristics) had the largest number of items rated very important. Items with across category reliability in recurring importance were (1) parent and teacher communication (TP1 Category 2 and 4; TP2 Category 6, 8, and 9); (2) parent involvement in identifying or defining child needs (TP1 Category 3; TP2 Category 7); an parents acquiring information about the receiving school or c assroom, especially through visits (TP2 Category 5, 6, and 7).

Table 4 presents those items within each category that 80%

Insert Table 4

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or more parents rated somewhat important (2.0) or not important (1.0). Only five categories had items that met this low importance criteria (Category 1, 6, 8, 10, and 12). Category 8 (Specific features of receiving program) and 12 (Criteria for selcting receiving program) had the largest number of items rated somewhat or not important. The item that was consistently rated low in importance was parental support activities or meetings attended by other parents (TP1 Category 1; TP2 Category 6, 8, and 12).

Analysis of TP1 and TP2 open-ended questions (Table 5) showed

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Insert Table 5
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that parents were in agreement on broader issues addressed by several of the questions. When TP1 was administered early in the transition process (during the fall of the final preschool year), 44% of the parents responding expressed lack of understanding of transition planning, and only 42% were comfortable with their understanding of what transition planning involved. Eighty-seven percent of responding parents wanted schools and teachers to share responsibility for transition planning. However, parents (93%) were willing to work with their child at home for an average of 5.25 hours per week (range: .75-20 hrs/wk). Parents targeted the skills that they would work on with their child, with preacademic tasks being cited by 79% of the parents. Twenty-seven different tasks were named by parents, indicating the high degree of individualization contained within this broader analysis. All parents (100%) cited preacademics as an area with which their child needed help. Sixty-percent of the parents indicated their child was ready to leave preschool and enter a new school.

Near the end of the preschool year when parents filled out TP2, 67% indicated that they were now comfortable with their understanding of what was involved in selecting or making decisions about the new school and classroom. However, 81% still

wanted to share responsibility for school selection with the school and teacher. In fact, 20 different suggestions were made for ways schools and teachers could make the transition process easier for the family and child (e.g., inform parents about transition, teacher meet with parents, teacher be patient and allow time for child to adjust to new classroom). Seventy-nine percent were interested in using a checklist to guide their visits to the new school.

Discussion

The Transition Planners were designed to get parent's to think about and prepare for their child's transition from preschool to elementary school. The instruments were designed to introduce parents to a number of categories related to school transitions. Numerous items within each category were included to expose parents to the many issues raised during transitions. Rankings were included to enable parents to focus on their individual priorities within each category and make the early stages of the planning process more manageable.

For instance, parents could complete Transition Planner 1 prior to the IEP meeting in the fall of the final preschool year. TP1 assists parents in identifying sources of information regarding transition and ways to prepare for transition. Goals related to preparing the child and family for transition, which parents rate as very important goals, could then be added to the

child's education plan (e.g., training shoe typing, counting, colors, etc.). This feature of the Transition Planner individualized the process.

Parents could complete the Transition Planner 2 during the spring of the final preschool year, prior to the school placement meeting. The TP2 helps parents identify program characteristics which they consider relevent to their child's placement. The parents could transfer information which they ranked as very important onto a checklist. They could then use their individualized checklist when visiting new programs and when meeting with school personnel regarding selection of a new program. The checklist would serve as a reminder to the parent to discuss and look for program characteristics and learning goals which the parent considered relevent to the choice of their child's new school program.

An example of an individualized checklist is presented in Table 6. In this example, the family's questions will focus upon

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Insert Table 6

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the school, the teacher, the classroom, other children in the classroom, the parent's role in the receiving program, and identifying program differences. As each topic is discussed, the parent can indicate whether the question has been answered satisfactorily by circling Yes or No (far left column). If

important facts are obtained or questions arise to be pursued later, notes can be made.

Individualization of the transition process was maximized by including open-ended questions that focused upon individual needs, such as skills parents wanted to train at home. However, this individualization did not mask the fact that parents demonstrated a high degree of agreement in what they thought were important issues to consider during school transition. While all categories were considered important, parents focused most upon categories and items that addressed child needs and the child's school environment. Parents were willing to do things to prepare for their child's transition, such as talking with the child's teacher, visiting the child's classroom, and helping identify the child's skills and needs. Parents also had opinions about what they wanted or considered important in the receiving program. Certain teacher, classroom, and classmate characteristics received high ratings. Important teacher characteristics were teacher warmth and caring manner, ability to communicate with parents, effective teaching, interaction, and discipline of children. The most important classroom characteristic was time for small group instruction; and the most important classmate characteristic was someone with whom the handicapped child could be friends.

Parents also demonstrated a high degree of agreement in what

they thought were unimportant issues to consider during school transition, and these items have been deleted from versions currently being field tested. Parents were least concerned about activities or meetings that promoted parent-to-parent interaction and support. Perhaps the Transition Planner's focus on school-related features minimized or failed to raise the benefits that some parents report can be derived from interaction with other parents of handicapped children (Winton, Turnbull, & Blacher, 1984; 1985). Alternatively, the Transition Planners and the school information provided during the interview process may provide parents with the information needed to plan for school transitions, thus reducing their dependence upon other parents for information.

Previous research indicates that the transition from preschool to elementary school can be stressful for both parents and child (e.g., Zigler, 1985; Winton & Turnbull, 1981; Turnbull & Winton, 1983). A recent study by Johnson et al. (1986) interviewed parents of young children with handicaps, approximately four months after their children's transition from a special education preschool to an elementary school. Although all parents reported that they had taken part in their child's placement decision, they indicated that they would have liked more information regarding the transition and more opportunities to speak with and visit the receiving program. Interestingly,

40% of the parents reported that they had experienced stress during the process and half of the parents reported that their child had demonstrated signs of stress (e.g., tears, stomach upsets). The transition planners presented in this article were developed in response to these parent concerns. We are currently assessing, if participation in the transition planners reduced the parents' anxieties regarding their child's change of programs.

Currently, transition planners (TP 3 and TP4) are being developed and field tested for use during the child's fall semester in the new school program. TP3 is used to facilitate communication between the new teacher and the family. TP4 is used at the end of the school's first quarter to evaluate the child's adjustment to the new program and the family's satisfaction with the child's adjustment.

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TABLE 1

TYPE OF IMPAIRMENT PRESENT IN TARGET CHILDREN

Impairment	Suburban (N=18)	Rural (N=12)	Total (N=30)	%
	a			
Speech	9	10	19	63%
Hearing	1	1	2	7%
Visual	0	1	1	3%
Learning Delay	5	2	7	23%
Motor	2	1	3	10%
Genetic Disorder	1	2	3	10%
Behavior Problems	4	1	5	17%
Placement				
Normal Classroom	14	-		
Special Classroom	3	-		
No data	1	12		

a = column totals exceed number of target children due to double diagnoses of some children.

TABLE 2

CORRELATION BETWEEN GROUP MEANS OF

SUBURBAN VS. RURAL PARENTS' CATEGORY RATINGS

Category	CORRELATION r
Transition Planner 1	
1. General transition information	.723
2. Sources of program information	.625
3. Parent's participation level	.729
4. Sources of child progress information	.869
Transition Planner 2	
5. General description of receiving programs	.797
6. Sources of program information	.943
7. Parent's participation in receiving program	.933
8. Specific features of receiving programs	.940
9. Description of teacher characteristics	.455
10. Description of classroom characteristics	.736
11. Description of other children in classroom	.524
12. Criteria for selecting receiving program	.728

TABLE 3

CATEGORY ITEMS RATED VERY IMPORTANT (3.0) BY 80% OF PARENTS

Transition Planner 1

		a	b	c
1.	General transition information (13 items)			
	"I would like information about:"			
	Skills child expected to know in public school			
	The public school system: contact people			
	Assessment and testing for public school			
2.	Sources of program information (7 items)			
	"I want to get information by:"			
	Talking to my child's teacher			
3.	Parent's participation level (10 items)			
	"I would like to:"			
	Help the teacher learn about my child's needs			
	Select goals to be worked on in preschool			
	Help keep track of my child's progress at home			
4.	Sources of child progress information (6 items)			
	"I want to learn by:"			
	Meeting with my child's teacher			

Transition Planner 2

5.	General description of receiving programs (6 items)			
	"I would like information about:"			
	The types of classrooms my child may attend			
6.	Sources of program information (6 items)			
	"I want to get information by:"			
	Talking to my child's teacher			
	Visiting the public school classroom			
7.	Parent's participation in receiving program (6 items)			
	"I would like to:"			
	Visit the schools and classrooms my child may attend			
	Help identify my child's needs in a new program			
	Contact the school to make appointments			

8. Specific features of receiving programs (14 items)
   "The school program should:"
      Allow me to talk with my child's
        teachers/principals
      Provide special education services if needed
        by child
      Meet my child's educational and social needs
      Be knowledgeable and supportive of my
        child's needs
      Encourage participation at IEP or
        parent/teacher meeting

9. Teacher characteristics (11 items)
   "My child's teacher should:"
      Be warm and caring
      Communicate with me
      Discipline children fairly and effectively
      Has effective teaching skills
      Clearly let children know what is expected
      Pay attention to an reward good behavior

10. Classroom characteristics (11 items)
    "The classroom should allow:"
       Time for small group instruction for child

11. Description of other children in classroom (8 items)
    "It's important that there are children:"
       My child can be friends with

12. Criteria for selecting receiving program (13 items)
    "It's important to think about:"
       Special services

a
 =Category
b
 =Total number of items within a category
c
 =Item

TABLE 4

CATEGORY ITEMS RATED SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (2.0) OR
NOT IMPORTANT (1.0) BY 80% OF PARENTS

Transition Planner 1

	a	b
1. General transition information (13 items)		
"I would like information about:"		
Parent support groups		
Transition Planner 2		
6. Sources of program information (6 items)		
"I want to get information by:"		
Attending parent workshops		
8. Specific features of receiving programs (14 items)		
"The school program should:"		
Provide parent programs		
Provide the opportunity to meet other parents		
10. Classroom characteristics (11 items)		
"The classroom should allow:"		
Children to stay in one area for activities		
12. Criteria for selecting receiving program (13 items)		
"It's important to think about:"		
School services such as parent groups		
Other children in the class		
Where my child's friends go to school		

a
=Category
b
=Total number of items within a category

TABLE 5

ANALYSIS OF PARENT RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Transition Planner 1	% of Parents Responding
1. Do not understand what is involved in transition planning	44%
2. Not comfortable with understanding of what is involved in transition planning	42%
3. Want to share responsibility for the transition process with the school and teachers	87%
4. Want to work with your child at home on certain skills	93%
Time willing to spend: Mean = 5.25 hr/wk (Range: .75-20 hr/wk)	

	Preacademics	Speech/Language	Self-Help
Skills want to work on	79%	29%	25%
Skills child needs to learn	100%	36%	36%

5. Child is ready to leave preschool and enter a new school and classroom	60%

Transition Planner 2	
1. Are comfortable with understanding of what is involved in selecting or making decisions about the new school and classroom	67%
2. Want to share responsibility for school selection decision process with the school and teacher	81%
3. Would like to use a checklist to help guide visits to the new school and classroom	79%

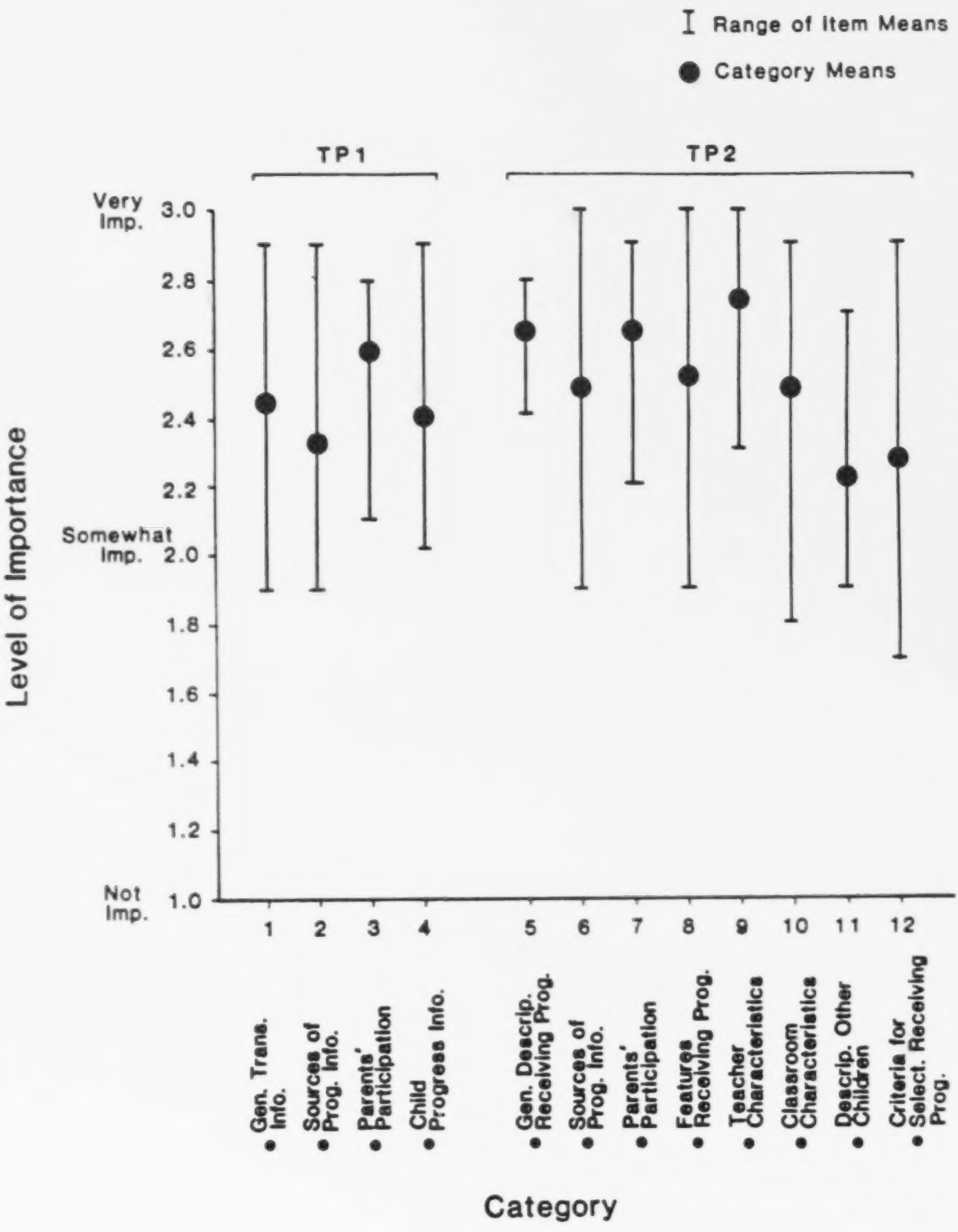
TABLE 6
CLASSROOM CHECKLIST

Am I Satisfied?	I Want to Know About:	Comments:
	1. The school program's	
Yes No	a. Special education services	
Yes No	b. Methods of meeting my child's needs	
Yes No	c. School-home communication policy	
	2. The classroom teacher's	
Yes No	a. Experience with special needs children	
Yes No	b. Communication with aides & therapist	
Yes No	c. Communication with me	
	3. The classroom activities and routines:	
Yes No	a. Is there individual instruction	
Yes No	b. Is there small group instruction	
Yes No	c. Is there large group instruction	
	4. Other children in the classroom:	
Yes No	a. Can they help my child	
Yes No	b. Can my child help other children	
Yes No	c. Are there special needs children	
	5. Other:	
Yes No	a. Find out parent's role	
Yes No	b.	
Yes No	c.	

6. List some of the differences between the preschool program and this program.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Parents' rating of importance of Transition Planner 1 and 2 categories.


I Range of Item Means
Category Means
TP1
TP2
Very Imp.
Somewhat Imp.
Not Imp.
3.0
2.8
2.6
2.4
2.2
2.0
1.8
1.6
1.4
1.2
1.0
Level of Importance
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
• Gen. Trans. Info.
• Sources of Prog. Info.
• Parents' Participation
• Child Progress Info.
• Gen. Descrip. Receiving Prog.
• Sources of Prog. Info.
• Parents' Participation
• Features Receiving Prog.
• Teacher Characteristics
• Classroom Characteristics
• Descrip. Other Children
• Criteria for Select. Receiving Prog.
Category